

*This chapter is dedicated to
my daughter, Connie Prickett,
and my wife, Barbara, who
are always my guiding lights.*



Regardless of your age, the gift of fitness is one of the most important things that you can give to yourself. It'll enhance your life and help you take those critical steps toward wellness and a holistic lifestyle. The pursuit of fitness doesn't have to cost any money but it does take effort and dedication. It'll take you on an enjoyable journey through life where you can remain independent and energetic. It's a gift that you should never stop giving yourself.

This chapter will provide those who are more than 50 years of age insight into this special gift and help you to better understand the basic fitness needs for older adults. You'll learn many new and exciting fitness opportunities from which to choose plus develop a new personal, mental perspective from which to work. Individual fitness programs can be made simple and enjoyable and most everyone can start one regardless of age or current physical condition. (Some people may require clearance from a physician.) The key to success is to maintain your fitness program throughout life.

More and more people are physically active well into their 80s and 90s. These individuals enjoy the gift of fitness every day by participating in activities such as walking, swimming, biking, hiking, playing basketball

and running. Some even compete on a national level in programs such as the Senior Olympics. All are proving that fitness is truly ageless.

Whether you're driven by competition or just out to have fun, being active is beneficial to your health and fitness. It'll make you more energetic and productive and can help you to remain independent. Fitness programs for older adults can be very simple and rewarding. What's more, they're available to all. Doing simple, basic movements and exercises regularly are the best ways to increase your energy. Exercising doesn't have to be complicated, difficult or time-consuming. It just takes a little motivation and common sense.

SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES

Today, one of the fastest growing segments of the population is the inactive adult. As this inactive population grows, its members become more susceptible to illness and health problems. In today's mechanized world, the need for physical activity is largely diminished. While things such as cars and computers can make life easier, they can also contribute to a sedentary lifestyle. The seduction of modern conveniences is often compounded by the common misconception

Chapter 16

Senior Fitness

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that older adults require less physical activity. This simply isn't true. The body needs daily movement. Without it, muscles become smaller and bones become brittle. The older that a person gets, the more exercise is needed to maintain health and fitness. And exercise can actually alleviate the stiffness that comes with aging. Although exercise doesn't necessarily make it all go away, it can help you to remain mobile and feeling good.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

The list of benefits from exercise is endless. Improved strength, flexibility, balance, endurance, agility and quality of life are only a few. The only way to achieve these benefits is through exercise and fitness participation. Both the nervous and digestive systems

function much better when exercise is done on a regular basis.

The mental rewards are just as great. Stress and depression are both reduced by fitness. Increased self-image and self-confidence along with improved problem-solving and social skills are also on this list. Furthermore, people who are physically active are more attractive to others because of their positive outlook and good health.

INACTIVITY

Energy and stamina aren't qualities that must be given up with age. They're more likely to be robbed by inactivity than by aging. With a little effort, however, energy, stamina and even strength can easily be developed and maintained. An active lifestyle is the perfect antidote for the major killer andcrippler of our time: inactivity. The U. S. Surgeon General points to a public need for physical fitness at all ages and projects that if more Americans were exercising and practicing more active lifestyles, our national health costs could be cut in half or more. For most Americans, this is a major concern.

What can be done about it? How do older adults find a way to start exercising? How do they become involved in personal or group-exercise programs? In brief, start

simple: Take the stairs at the mall or at work rather than the escalator or elevator, park your car farther away from the store, take walks in the morning or after dinner or just play with your grandchildren. These tips aren't that difficult to accomplish if the desire is there. Remember to start slowly and work up to a level that's appropriate for you. The road to fitness takes time but once you're there, it's more than worth it.

THE NEED FOR BASIC MOVEMENT

Your body is a living part of nature and like all living animals, it must be kept active or your muscles will begin to get smaller and weaker. Sedentary lifestyles and lack of movement accelerate the process of muscle deterioration that, in turn, speeds up the process of aging. There's no part of the body that doesn't need meaningful exercise on a regular basis. Simple movements and stretching are a good place to start. The next step toward a more active lifestyle is to slowly include activities that help build your heart and lungs and improve overall physical condition. (As with any exercise program, you should consult your physician before getting started.)

CHANGE, CHALLENGE AND DIVERSITY

One of the biggest enemies of exercise is boredom. Doing the same thing over and over again is enough to dampen the spirit of even the most ardent fitness enthusiast. The challenge of any fitness program is to learn how to keep it new and, above all, fun. Change, challenge and diversity are the keys to maintaining continued interest as an active participant. It just takes a little creativity and imagination to reach for new ideas and seek the fun and adventures that they offer. Replace the notion of exercise as an unbearable chore with exercise as a pleasurable experience. Becoming aware of the many diverse choices will help you to build a foundation for your physical activities that'll give you confidence and motivation for a lifetime.

HAVE A PLAN

The best way to start a fitness program is to have a plan that addresses your basic physical and mental needs for activity and how to achieve them. Understanding the role that fitness plays in your life helps to meet these needs. Next, learn how to enjoy what you're doing. To accomplish this, you have to learn how to maintain your interest. Here are some tips to help you plan:

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Swimming is an activity that's enjoyed by older adults who wish to stay in top shape and/or are competitive athletes.

- **Set small goals.**
- **Choose a time of day or night to perform your exercise program and stick to it.**
- **Try to find an exercise partner with whom you can work out.**
- **Find ways to keep your mind sharp as you exercise.**
- **Aim for holistic fitness that involves the harmony of mind, body and spirit. No fitness program should be without this combination.**

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

Build your fitness and endurance slowly. Work out several times a week for 20-30 minutes. Incorporate other daily activities such as simple routines that require physical movement that can develop into a lifestyle pattern. A final step in your action plan should be to create a fitness log to record your daily activities.

To attain holistic fitness, it's important to use your mind and body. Try to visualize the muscle groups in your body from your toes to your nose and then exercise them comprehensively while targeting those that you feel need the most attention. In particular, exercise the muscle groups that

don't get a lot of action on a daily basis such as those that are located behind your arms and legs.

Keep a fitness log, and be sure to record all of your workouts and track your performances. Always keep your goals realistic and attainable. If you don't feel very energetic on a certain day, it's okay to do less but note it in your log. Always listen to your body. Maintaining a log may help you to identify patterns in your level of energy. It can also show you the progress that you've made each week. Success breeds success. Before you know it, you'll soon look forward to exercising each day because it's fun. Again, be mindful of your abilities and don't force it; let it happen naturally and become a habit. Exercise because you enjoy it. The more you practice this, the more it becomes true. If you're detail-oriented, you can track many components including flexibility, endurance, balance, oxygen intake, aerobic fitness, skill, agility, bodyweight, personal appearance and self-confidence. All of these goals are measurable and fun to track.

FITNESS SAFETY TIPS

Here are seven safety tips to help you feel comfortable and confident in your exercise program:

1. Warm up and cool down.

Warm ups and cool downs are critical to preparing the body for action and allowing it to return to a normal state after exercise. Spend about 3-5 minutes on each. A sudden leap into an exercise routine without a warm up can place extra stress on the heart. Likewise, suddenly going from activity to inactivity is also stressful. The cool-down may also prevent stiffness and soreness the next day. This, then, helps to leave a much more pleasurable memory of the exercise experience and build a stronger desire to return the next day.

There's no agreement on an ideal or optimal warm up; many methods can be effective. Start your warm up by taking three deep breaths to help the flow of oxygen through your body. Roll your neck, shrug your shoulders and shake out your wrists and ankles. Stretch your hamstrings and ankles. Prepare yourself mentally for the rewarding fitness journey that you're about to take.

2. Exercise to the point of pleasure.

Feeling joint pain or undue stress is a sign that you've gone a little too far. Step back to the level of pleasure and feel good about the activity. Remember, you're not necessarily training to be competitive athlete; you're training to be a healthy and fit person who enjoys life.

3. Use common sense.

Learn to read your body; it won't lie to you. Be aware of your exercising heart rate as your body's way of measuring your level of effort.

4. SMILE.

The acronym SMILE stands for "Smooth Movement in Leisure Exercises." Design your exercise program to consist of mainly smooth movements and you're likely to discover that the routine becomes easier and more comfortable. SMILE removes the jerking and pounding movements that can eventually cause joint problems. Moving smoothly – such as during Tai Chi and wand exercises – allows a participant to master routines in slow motion. A side benefit to this is that the slow-motion movements can become second nature and help when an older adult must react swiftly in the event of a trip or fall.

5. Educate yourself.

The more you learn about fitness and exercise, the more competent you become. Keep your interest up and your mind sharp: borrow fitness books from the library or search the Internet for interesting (but credible) articles and tips.

6. Have confidence in yourself.

Confidence in exercise helps to build confidence in other aspects of your life. It

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Try to find an exercise partner with whom you can work out.

Find ways to keep your mind sharp as you exercise.

Aim for holistic fitness that involves the harmony of mind, body and spirit. No fitness program should be without this combination.



The National Huntsman Games is a senior athletic competition that draws thousands of participants each year, including these members of the New Jersey Senior 65+ Basketball Team.

to continue with your fitness program once it's been established than to have to start over from scratch.

FITNESS REQUIRES EFFORT

There are no miracle pills or potions that can help you get fit. It simply has to be developed and maintained through individual effort. Here, there are three basic steps: (1) get involved; (2) choose the level that you wish to attain and maintain; and (3) enjoy it.

If you're 50 years of age or older, you don't necessarily need a regimented program that overstresses your body. Instead, strive for a simple, healthy, holistic program of exercise.

PHYSICAL GAINS

Your body's ability to adapt to physical exertion is how it builds strength, power and endurance. These physical gains allow you to work out a little harder the next time. Your challenge is to recognize the level of fitness that's right for you. Don't make the mistake of exercising beyond your means as this is where you may experience physical problems. At this point, step back a little to where you feel comfortable and stay in your comfort zone.

can become a self-perpetuating cycle that keeps you moving and feeling positive.

7. Maintain your program.

Stick with your fitness program. Make adjustments to the intensity of your workouts as needed, backing off when your body signals distress in the form of joint pain. Keep in mind, though, that it's much easier

SAMPLE WORKOUTS

Now that you know more about the benefits of exercise, let's discuss some sample workouts to help you get started. The workouts are broken down into five different levels: I, II, III, IV and V with the higher numerals corresponding to greater challenges. Review them, choose one level or combine several based on your goals and get fit! (Note: For reasons of space and simplicity, the sample workouts don't show warm ups and cool downs. Nevertheless, a warm up should be done before your workout and a cool down after.)

Level I Workouts

Workouts at Level I consist of daily short walks, mild water exercises, basic stretching and mild isometrics (essentially pitting one muscle against another). You can even include shopping, gardening or any other light physical work. Your goal is to stay physically active every day and enjoy what you're doing. A sample week for Level I Workouts is shown in Figure 16.1.

Level II Workouts

In Level II Workouts, you're required to walk a little farther and do deep-breathing exercises, more vigorous stretching and yoga or Tai Chi. Pedaling a stationary bicycle with a low level of resistance and/or using light

Figure 16.1: Sample Week Workouts

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Level 1	Stretch/ 5 minutes Walk/ 15 minutes	Stretch/ 5 minutes Do light gardening/ 15 minutes	Stretch/ 5 minutes Do water exercises/ 15 minutes	Stretch/ 5 minutes	Stretch/ 5 minutes Walk/ 15 minutes	Stretch/ 5 minutes Dance/ 15 minutes	Relax, you've earned it!
Level 2	Stretch/ 6 minutes Walk/ 20 minutes	Stretch/ 6 minutes Do yoga (beginner video)	Stretch/ 6 minutes Walk/ 20 minutes	Stretch/ 6 minutes Do yoga (beginner video)	Stretch/ 6 minutes Play tennis with friends	Stretch/ 6 minutes Swim or bike/ 20 minutes (easy)	Relax, you've earned it!
Level 3	Stretch/ 7 minutes Walk/ 25 minutes (vigorous)	Relax, you've earned it!	Stretch/ 7 minutes Swim/ 15 minutes (vigorous)	Stretch/ 7 minutes Bike with a friend around the park	Stretch/ 7 minutes Walk/ 25 minutes (vigorous)	Stretch/ 7 minutes Take a Water Aerobics Class	Relax, you've earned it!
Level 4	Stretch/ 8 minutes Go in-line skating/ 20 minutes (vigorous)	Stretch/ 8 minutes Do strength training/ 20 minutes (light weights; focus on major muscles)	Stretch/ 8 minutes Walk/ 30 minutes (vigorous)	Stretch/ 8 minutes Do strength training/ 20 minutes (light weights; focus on major muscles)	Stretch/ 8 minutes Swim/ 20 minutes (vigorous)	Stretch/ 10 minutes Take an Aerobic Dance Class	Relax, you've earned it!
Level 5	Stretch/ 10 minutes Bike/ 30 minutes	Stretch/ 10 minutes Do strength training/ 30 minutes	Stretch/ 10 minutes Swim/ 30 minutes	Stretch/ 10 minutes Do strength training/ 30 minutes	Stretch/ 10 minutes Take an Aerobic Dance Class	Stretch/ 10 minutes Do yoga and walk or run/ 30 min	Relax, you've earned it!



weights are also good activities. Another choice might be to participate in a mild adaptive sport or group activity that adds a social component to the mix. Here, your goal is to have a good time at a relaxed and confident pace three or four times a week. At this level, you should consider starting your fitness log. A sample week for Level II Workouts is shown in Figure 16.1.

Level III Workouts

This level stresses basic aerobic activities that require a greater oxygen intake and an increased heart rate to attain cardiorespiratory benefits. To prepare for more vigorous activities and stress your muscles, you'll do strength training and make stretching more challenging or practice basic yoga. Consider performing Qigong or wand exercises, two excellent Asian activities that are very safe, easy to do and wonderful ways to exercise every muscle group in your body to build strength, stamina and flexibility. Ultimately, your goal is to walk for at least 15 minutes at a pace that elevates your heart rate to a desirable level. Also, you can enjoy other aerobic activities such as line dancing, square dancing, senior aerobic dancing and water aerobics. A sample week for Level III Workouts is shown in Figure 16.1.

Level IV Workouts

Workouts at Level IV include strength training and flexibility activities. If possible, incorporate different activities such as walking fast, jogging on a treadmill or using a stationary bicycle. Strength training (with free weights or machines) will help you to improve your stamina for aerobic activities. To retain your motivation and involve others in your workout, join an exercise class or a walking group. Your overall goal is to use all of your muscles in different directions, elevate your heart rate and enjoy the experience of physical gains. A sample week for Level IV Workouts is shown in Figure 16.4.

Level V Workouts

This final level is for older adults who wish to stay in top shape and/or are competitive athletes. Serious hiking, biking, swimming, tennis, golf, basketball and skiing are among the activities that are enjoyed by this group of people. The regularity and intensity of training at this level is vital to safety and skill maintenance. Practicing a consistent routine of challenging workouts four or five times a week is a norm for senior athletes. As a result, this group tends to have strong hearts and excellent lung capacity.

During your warm up, work on your ankles, calves and knees. Stretch your

muscles, paying particular attention to your hamstrings to help prevent low-back and leg injuries. Work on your neck, shoulder, lower back and abdominal muscles, too. As part of your routine, include 15-20 minutes of strength training two to three times per week to help maintain that muscular strength that's so very much needed by senior athletes.

After warming up, your body is prepared to take on heavier demands and additional physical challenges. The aerobic activities from which you can choose are virtually infinite. These include running on a treadmill, using a stairclimber/stepper, hiking, biking, jogging and swimming. Golfing and bowling are also great ways to stay fit but they also require sufficient warm up to reduce the risk of injury.

High-impact sports can sometimes have a long-term, negative effect on bones and joints. If joint pain gets you down, try non-weight-bearing activities such as biking, rowing and swimming. Remember to always follow the second safety rule: Exercise to the point of pleasure. A sample week for Level V Workouts is shown in Figure 16.1.

MORE CHOICES FOR THE MORE ACTIVE

For the older adult who's more active, new opportunities and activity groups are emerging each day. Information about the

following groups (and others) can be found on the Internet:

- **The Over-the-Hill Gang is made up of individuals more than 70 years of age who bike, hike, ski and travel together in search of new ways to stay challenged and active.**
- **The National Senior Games attracts more than 10,000 senior athletes to its annual sports competition.**
- **The National Huntsman Games is another senior athletic competition that draws thousands of participants each year to bike, run, swim, shoot and compete against each other.**
- **The Old and the Restless Club and the Elder Hostel programs are two additional senior organizations that help to bring active, older Americans into the world of fitness.**

FITNESS IS AGELESS!

Fitness opportunities are available to all individuals, regardless of their age or physical condition. Fitness is fun, necessary and beneficial to all. By exercising to the point of pleasure, everyone can participate safely in fitness programs. There are no replacements for the joys of holistic living.





A special fitness poem is shown at the end of the chapter. It takes the reader from the depths of a sedentary lifestyle into the benefits of fitness and all the wonders that it provides. The poem was written for Living with Cancer patients at St. Clare's Hospital in Denville (NJ) who were participating in a special fitness-education program. As you read the poem, visualize what the message says of the power of fitness.



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Walking into Fitness

Without movement, I was alone and indifferent to the world.

I looked at the trees but could not see their colors nor feel their presence.

I passed the flowers but could not sense their pleasant fragrance nor the essence and beauty that should have been there.

I listened to music but could not hear the beat.

As I met people, I felt invisible to them and they to me.

Then I stood.

I began to move, to walk, to run.

Now I see colors: gold, green, blue and red.

I smell the sweet fragrance of flowers, so strong and full of life.

I hear music, internalize the beat and pretend I am a dancing bear.

When I meet people, I am no longer blind to their smiles; I soak up their laughter.

As I walk and as I run, I am full of life, ready to take on challenges and confident that I can succeed.

I smile from the inside and am attuned to what's around me.

I grow stronger with each breath and banish weakness to a distant memory.

Energy begets energy and I am glowing like the moon, radiating like the sun.

The spirit of fitness is an inseparable part of me and all I have to do to keep it with me is to keep moving.

